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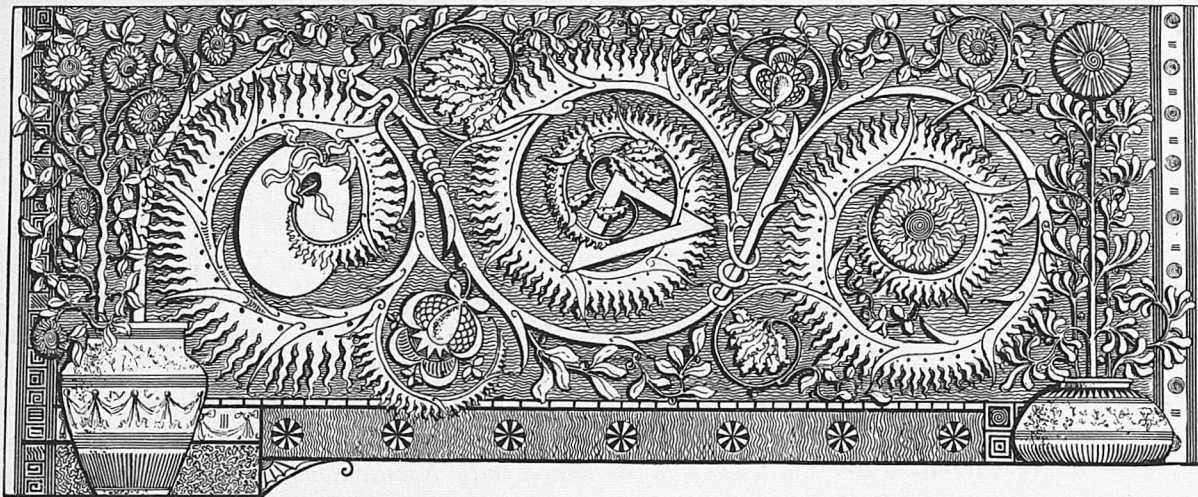
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DESIGNED FOR THE AMERICAN ART REVIEW BY J. A. SCHWEINFURTH.

## THE WORKS OF THE AMERICAN ETCHERS.

### VIII.—ANNA LEA MERRITT.



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LACE AUX DAMES!" As a rule it is the custom of the REVIEW to open each monthly number with a fresh article, and to relegate continuations, or such articles as form parts of a series already begun, to more remote pages. If this maxim is disregarded in the present instance, it will hardly be necessary to offer an excuse. The fact that the subject of this notice is the first American woman who appears prominently before the public as an etcher would be sufficient to explain why the place of honor is given to her work and its discussion, even if the quality of that work were not as high as it actually is.

Women etchers are comparatively rare. Of those of the past, Angelica Kaufmann is perhaps the best known. Madame de Pompadour—if it be allowable to mention so disreputable a character in connection with decent women—wiled away the hours of her *ennui* by toying with needle and acid. Maria Catharina Prestel might also be named, although the bulk of her work was done in aquatint. Among the high-born dames of to-day, Queen Victoria is said to have amused herself with etching. Madame O'Connell, whose tragic fate has lately been the subject of so much comment, figures among French etchers, in spite of her being by birth a German and married to an Irishman. Louise von Parmentier is an Austrian painter who

also etches. Of American women etchers, Mrs. Thomas Moran and Mrs. Peter Moran were mentioned in the February number of the REVIEW.

MRS. ANNA LEA MERRITT is a Philadelphian. She did not begin to study painting until she was twenty-one years old, and, to her own regret, never had the advantage of academic training. For four years Miss Lea travelled on the continent of Europe with her parents and sisters, but only at intervals found opportunities for practical study. In the year 1871 she finally per-

suaded her relatives to leave her in England, and the same year exhibited her first picture, a portrait, at the Royal Academy. Since then she has been a constant exhibitor at this institution, her residence for the greater part of the year being in London. But she usually spends a few winter months in Philadelphia, which are always fully employed in the painting of portraits. Miss Lea was also an exhibitor at the Centennial, where, to quote her own words, she "was not deprived of the diploma and medal awarded to everybody." In London she made the acquaintance of Henry Merritt,—artist, restorer, and author,—and had the benefit of his instruction. From him, indeed, whom she calls her "dear master," she "learned all the art she has." Her wedded life with him was happy, but short; for not many months after their marriage Mr. Merritt fell a victim to a malady, the seeds of which had been sown in early childhood. Mrs. Merritt erected a monument to her husband in the volumes which she published after his death:—*Henry Merritt. Art Criticism and Romance, with Recollections and Twenty-three Etchings by Anna Lea Merritt. London, 1879.* In these two volumes are gathered, besides the recollections from the pen of Mrs. Merritt, the criticisms and novels written by her husband, and their publication was the direct cause which induced the artist to become an etcher. It was for the sake of furnishing by her own hand the portrait which forms a frontispiece to these volumes that she first learned to etch,—one of the few rare instances in which true conjugal love can be traced as a motive power in art.

Mrs. Merritt's etched work comprises the following plates:<sup>1</sup>—

*Portrait of Henry Merritt.* From a photograph.—*Twelve vignettes*, reproductions of slight sketches by Henry Merritt, from letters written to Miss Lea.—*Illustrations of Robert Dalby*, 6 plates, and of *The Oxford Professor and the Harpist*, 5 plates. Original designs by Mrs. Merritt. In *Henry Merritt*, etc.

*Two Portraits of Mary Wollstonecraft*, the first from the original painting by Opie, in the possession of Sir Percy F. Shelley, Bart., the second from a photograph of a picture by Opie, in the possession of William Russell, Esq. In *Mary Wollstonecraft, Letters to Imlay*, London, 1879.

*View on the Thames.* Signed, 95 Cheyne Walk Chelsea London. Anna Lea Merritt.—Size of plate, breadth  $7\frac{1}{8}$ " ; height  $4\frac{1}{8}$ ".

*Portrait of Sir Gilbert Scott.* From a drawing by George Richmond, R. A.—Published herewith.

*Ellen Terry as Ophelia.* From recollection, and aided by photographs of the actress in other characters.—Published in *The Etcher*.

*Professor Louis Agassiz.* From a photograph. Signed, Anna Lea Merritt, 1879.—Size of plate, B.  $4\frac{7}{8}$ " ; h.  $7\frac{9}{16}$ ". (In a few early impressions the plate measures  $7\frac{1}{8}$ " in height.)

*Portrait of De Witt.* After an early engraving. Book-plate for one of the publications of Messrs. C. Kegan Paul & Co., of London.

*Ophelia.* From an original painting by the etcher. Signed, and dated 1880.—Size of plate, B.  $6\frac{3}{4}$ " ; h. 9".

Mrs. Merritt's qualities as an etcher must not be judged from the book illustrations she has done. The plates in the two memorial volumes are first attempts; of the Wollstonecraft portraits the artist herself says, that "the work is too veiled and fuzzy." The *Portrait of Sir Gilbert Scott*, the eminent English architect, lately deceased, which accompanies this notice, shows the great advance she has since made. The marvellous combination of delicacy and strength in the modelling of the head is such that this plate may justly claim rank among the best of modern etched portraits. And yet the plate in its present state, which is in reality the third, falls measurably behind in delicacy when compared with the first state, of which only a few trial impressions are in existence. In the desire to obtain greater strength, the harmony of the first state was disturbed, and although the third is as near as possible a restoration to the first state, the plate has nevertheless lost something of its freshness and subtlety in the process.

From the delicacy of the work it would seem as if the artist had made a free use of the dry-point in finishing. But an inspection with the lens reveals the fact that all the lines are etched, the modelling having been obtained by superimposed lines, most tenderly bitten.

S. R. KOEHLER.

<sup>1</sup> The measurements of most of Mrs. Merritt's plates are omitted, as the works in which they were published are accessible in every library, and as the proofs of some of them were out of my reach while I was writing this notice.